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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3044

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MANILA 000218

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE DEFENSE SECRETARY BELIEVES TIME IS
RIGHT TO BUILD ON MIL-MIL COOPERATION

REF: A. 2008 MANILA 2730: TRANSITIONING THE
U.S.-PHILIPPINE MILITARY RELATIONSHIP
B. 2008 MANILA 2727: AMBASSADOR AND DEFENSE
SECRETARY DISCUSS SECURITY IN SOUTHERN
PHILIPPINES

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a wide-ranging discussion with senior Philippine defense officials January 29, the Ambassador emphasized that the United States and the Philippines have scored a number of successes on the security cooperation and counterterrorism fronts over the last several years, and that the Philippines is a valued strategic partner. Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro and Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines General Alexander Yano echoed the Ambassador's sentiment, adding that our bilateral military relationship was on a solid footing. Teodoro said the Philippine government's successes against key high value individuals of the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist organizations were achieved despite persistent shortfalls in logistical assets, and validated the contributions of U.S. military personnel to the improved combat capability of Philippine forces. With a new administration in Washington and presidential elections for the Philippines set for May 2010, Teodoro said that now was the time to showcase the depth of the U.S.-Philippine relationship in a variety of areas, including counterterrorism operations, disaster relief, and multilateral engagement. Looking forward, Teodoro and Yano emphasized that continued U.S. military assistance was necessary and that expanded programs could provide greater improvements in areas ranging from regional security to human rights. END SUMMARY.

STRONG BILATERAL DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP

¶2. (C) During a lengthy breakfast meeting at the Ambassador's residence, Philippine Secretary of National Defense Teodoro and Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) General Yano on January 29 discussed their vision of how U.S.-Philippine ties could be expanded in the coming months. Teodoro and Yano were accompanied by Teodoro's Senior Military Advisor, Defense Undersecretary Alberto Valenzuela, and Defense Undersecretary Antonio Santos. Engaging the Ambassador and embassy officers on a wide range of topics, the Philippine officials opened the breakfast by emphasizing that the U.S.-Philippine military relationship was firmly rooted in mutual values and objectives and that the Philippine government should make every effort to ensure that audiences in Washington were aware of the Philippines' commitment to growing their partnership with the United States.

¶ 3. (C) Teodoro said that the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty, which has been in place since 1953, could not be underestimated in importance and that it bolstered the already strong historical ties between the two countries in numerous ways. He cited the successes achieved through Philippine Defense Reform (PDR) with sustained U.S. assistance, and said that with the PDR set to conclude with his tenure in 2010, he had authorized his staff to complete two additional components in the next 16 months: a study of Philippine counterinsurgency doctrine based on current practices, and a review of information and psychological operations to determine the most effective way to build support for government efforts. Teodoro and Yano stressed that the next level of the U.S.-Philippine military relationship would go beyond combat training to look at broader strategic objectives. From increased ship visits to robust bilateral exercises to a national focus on civil-military and humanitarian activities (ref A), Teodoro stressed that the Philippine government welcomed U.S. military engagement and that his government was working to streamline administrative processes so bilateral activities proceed smoothly.

LOGISTICAL NEEDS A PRIORITY

¶ 4. (C) While confident that the AFP now has the combat capability to handle its internal security threats, Teodoro and Yano both acknowledged that logistical needs were a glaring deficiency and a top priority. However, Teodoro

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lamented that the limited Philippine defense budget prevented the purchase of big ticket items necessary for the AFP to prosecute the war on terrorists and at the same time provide vital year-round support to disaster relief and humanitarian operations throughout the country. When the Ambassador queried Teodoro and Yano about specific assets the Philippine government could best use, Teodoro noted that a team of subject matter experts provided by the U.S. Department of Defense were key to implementing a broad restructuring of various military management systems under PDR, and he requested the team be retained through 2010. On immediate equipment needs, Teodoro and Yano unhesitatingly agreed that C-130 transport aircraft and multi-role night capable helicopters were critical and should be procured through government to government channels to avoid potential accusations of corruption in the process. Teodoro said that with six C-130 aircraft -- in comparison with only a single aircraft currently in service -- and additional helicopters, significant gaps in logistical support could be remedied.

EXPANDING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, DISASTER RELIEF

¶ 5. (C) Apart from specific transportation needs, Secretary Teodoro repeatedly mentioned that additional USG resources for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief would be valuable in providing a tangible example of the benefits of the U.S.-Philippine military alliance (ref B). He remarked that while some critics find common ground in criticizing U.S. military training and field exercises, those same critics have difficulty in attracting support when they attack humanitarian assistance, such as civil-military operations. The need across the Philippines for such activities is great, said Teodoro, not just in conflict areas such as central Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, but also in impoverished areas that are perennially wrecked by typhoons and other natural disasters, such as Bicol in the central Philippines -- the site of civil-military events associated with this year's Balikatan bilateral military exercise.

¶6. (C) Planning the government's response to calamities is a large part of Teodoro's portfolio. As Secretary of National Defense, Teodoro also has responsibility for the National Defense Coordinating Council and reportedly spends up to sixty percent of his time on disaster relief issues, giving weight to his emphasis on this perennial problem in the Philippines. The Ambassador concurred in general that expanded civil-military operations, particularly those associated with disaster assistance, were an area the Mission would continue to explore.

PHILIPPINES PLAYING INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN REGION

¶7. (C) The Ambassador took the opportunity to thank Teodoro and Yano for the role the Philippines is playing as a partner in the region. The Philippines has advocated for better integration within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), particularly on Burma, human rights, and in pushing for greater multilateral cooperation within the forum.

Teodoro said he clearly had seen increasing interest in the region from outside players, including India and China. On several occasions during the breakfast, Teodoro noted that the upcoming ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) disaster relief exercise being hosted by the Philippines in May will be an excellent opportunity to build on the well-established relations that the Philippines has with its neighbors, particularly as it relates to humanitarian assistance during natural disasters, a problem shared by countries throughout the region.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador raised the possibility of broadening U.S.-Philippine military exercises to include observer nations, a proposal that Teodoro said was feasible given that a procedure for entry to the Philippines for third country military personnel had been established for the ARF disaster relief exercise. He did, however, state that continued tensions with Malaysia over border issues in Sabah made military-military cooperation between the Philippines and Malaysia somewhat challenging. In addition to praising the Philippine role in ASEAN, the Ambassador lauded General Yano and Secretary Teodoro for the Philippines consistent presence in international peacekeeping operations. A signatory to the Global Peace Operations Initiative in 2008, the Philippines

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contributes almost 700 military and police to eight United Nations peacekeeping missions worldwide.

CURRENT SECURITY CONCERNS

¶9. (C) Teodoro and Yano both stressed that although the security situation in the southern Philippines had improved significantly in the last couple of years, key high-value individuals remain on Jolo and Basilan islands (ref B). Teodoro opined that a focused campaign, to include disarming the populace on Jolo and Basilan in advance of the 2010 national elections, would be necessary to reduce the influence of insurgents and terrorists operating in the Sulu Archipelago. The blatant kidnappings on Jolo of International Committee for the Red Cross workers and the abduction of three teachers transiting from Zamboanga to Basilan this month highlighted the continuing challenges to Philippine military and police efforts to secure key areas in the southern Philippines. Teodoro and Yano welcomed continued USG military assistance in pursuing remaining high value individuals in the Sulu Archipelago and in providing training and other assets towards that effort.

¶10. (C) Turning to the Philippine government's fight against the New People's Army (NPA), Teodoro said that the strategy was not to focus on the NPA's ideology, as it no longer had one. Instead, the government would highlight the

group's erosion into purely criminal activity in public messages, further decreasing support for the NPA. Teodoro compared the government's success against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) to that of its efforts to break down the NPA as an organization. The end result in both cases was that the groups were having difficulty organizing themselves beyond a local level, and communication among leadership had become increasingly ineffective as government forces made inroads into both NPA and ASG strongholds.

EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RIGHTS ESSENTIAL

¶11. (C) The Philippine government's ongoing efforts to stabilize areas of the country under the influence of lawless or terrorist elements continues to lead to armed clashes with a variety of groups. The Ambassador commended the Philippine military's disciplined operations in the southern Philippines and elsewhere, but noted that a persistent focus on human rights was essential to eliminate abuses by security forces, including extrajudicial killings. Secretary Teodoro agreed, saying that approaching the issue of human rights from a strictly moral perspective was not sufficient, but rather that soldiers and law enforcement personnel had to understand that applying policies that indoctrinated a respect for human rights at all levels of the institutions would lead to greater credibility among the public and stronger respect for law and order. The Ambassador added that the Mission had developed a comprehensive agenda of events to address human rights in various fora over the next six months, including training and seminars for military officers and enlisted personnel, an effort which Teodoro and Yano said they fully supported and much appreciated.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Teodoro was open in his desire to see the Philippines "hype its successful cooperation with the U.S." and believes it is time to raise the level of U.S.-Philippine mil-mil cooperation, based on previous counterterrorism success and improvements in the Philippine military's capabilities. At the same time, Teodoro acknowledged the Philippine government must address corruption and make the country more attractive to foreign investment, particularly from U.S. businesses. Although Teodoro touts Philippine sovereignty, he also has said that Filipinos cannot confuse patriotism with suspicion of foreign investment and assistance. A potential presidential candidate in 2010, Teodoro has maintained a hawkish stance on Mindanao and is skeptical of the peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Nevertheless, he respects President Arroyo's desire to return to negotiations and recognizes the need for continued discipline by the Philippine military as it pursues high value individuals in the Sulu Archipelago and conducts operations against rogue MILF elements in central

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Mindanao.
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